

NEWS RELEASE

Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program

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EXPERIMENTAL MANAGEMENT OF NORTHERN PIKE AND SMALLMOUTH BASS CONTINUES IN UTAH AND COLORADO

LAKEWOOD, Colo. – In 2005, the Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program (Recovery Program) will continue a concerted effort to manage northern pike and smallmouth bass in certain river reaches where scientific evidence shows that these nonnative fish species threaten the survival of the endangered humpback chub, bonytail, Colorado pikeminnow and razorback sucker.

The experimental nonnative fish management research studies are designed to determine if management efforts are effective in reducing the numbers of targeted nonnative fishes in sections where they were removed; if endangered and other native fishes will increase in response to nonnative fish reductions; and where and how nonnative fishes are getting into the critical habitat sections of the upper basin.

Efforts will expand from last year to include additional river sections, work crews and removal trips. From April through October, biologists will work in 565 miles of the Colorado, Green, Duschesne and Yampa rivers in the states of Utah and Colorado. Depending on the river reach, they will target smallmouth bass and/or northern pike for removal.

“With the exception of the Yampa River in northwest Colorado, most of the northern pike populations in the Upper Colorado River Basin appear to be under control,” Recovery Program Director Robert Muth said. “The Utah Division of Wildlife Resources has done a good job holding the Green River northern pike population in check.

“We are working hard to reduce the number of northern pike in the Yampa River and to prevent them from moving into the Green River in Utah, where many of our native and endangered fish nursery habitats are located.”

Data since 2002 show a significant increase in the number of smallmouth bass.

“Throughout the Upper Colorado River Basin, smallmouth bass have proven to be a much bigger problem than previously anticipated,” said Recovery Program Nonnative Fish Coordinator Pat Nelson. “Although researchers removed large numbers of smallmouth bass in the Colorado,

Green and Yampa rivers last year, it's too early to tell if those reductions in numbers will persist over time, or if native and endangered fish populations will respond as predicted."

In Utah, this year's smallmouth bass research will focus primarily on removal in sections of the Green and Duschesne rivers. The smallmouth bass removed from the river will not be relocated to other waters because of the remoteness of the study areas and because Utah adheres to fish disease control rules and policies that prohibit fish transfers between water bodies without prior health certification. Certifying fish populations in large rivers as disease free would be nearly impossible.

A third nonnative fish species -- channel catfish -- also poses a serious threat to the endangered Colorado River fishes and has been the subject of past research. In 2003, capture methods proved inadequate for effective removal in most areas, and expanding smallmouth bass populations were considered a greater threat. As a result, channel catfish research will occur this year only in Yampa Canyon where effective removal has been demonstrated, and in the Duschesne River in Utah in cooperation with the Ute Indian Tribe.

This year's nonnative fish management effort is a collaborative effort among the Recovery Program, the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, the Colorado Division of Wildlife, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and biologists from Colorado State University.

Nonnative fish management is only one of several actions the Recovery Program is implementing to recover the endangered fishes. Efforts are also ongoing to provide river flows, restore habitat, construct fish ladders and screens, produce and stock endangered fish and monitor results.

Established in 1988, the Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program is a voluntary, cooperative program whose purpose is to recover the endangered fishes while water development proceeds in accordance with federal and state laws and interstate compacts. For more information, call 303-969-7322, ext. 227 or visit the Recovery Program's website: coloradoriverrecovery.fws.gov.